

DANCE STYLE LOCATOR

North Indian: Kathak



Kathak is among the six major classical dances of India, and one of the most dynamic theater arts in the world. The word kathak is derived from katha, meaning the “art of storytelling.” It is also synonymous with the community of artists known as Kathakas, whose hereditary profession was to narrate history while entertaining. With dance, music and mime these storytellers of ancient India would bring to life the great scriptures and epics of ancient times, especially the Mahabharata, Ramayana, and Puranas of Sanskrit literature.

From its early form as a devotional expression dedicated to the Hindu gods, kathak gradually moved out of the temples and into the courts of the rulers: the Hindu Maharajas and the Muslim Mughals. The Muslim conquest of India led to the Mughal Empires of the 15th through 19th centuries, creating a distinctive Indian-Islamic civilization, manifested largely through the arts. It was here that the Mughal leaders hired Kathakas to entertain them in their lavish courts. Due to the Islamic ideology, which forbade the representation of God in

human forms, the dancers needed to modify and disguise religious movements. It is in this period that the dance form was developed to include the intricate and mathematically complex footwork.

Though the Mughal Empires underwent decline during the British invasion of the mid-18th century, about 100 years later kathak enjoyed a renaissance and gained prominence among the Muslim *Nawabs* and *zamindars* (feudal overlords) not only as a form of entertainment, but also as a burgeoning classical art form. The rise in status and popularity in the early 1900’s is largely due to interest and attention from renowned dancers of various dance forms, from inside and outside of India. Kathak continues to develop and incorporate fresh innovations, and is presented around the world as an important North Indian classical art form.

Footwork and “Bols”

Tatkar is the basic footwork of kathak. While the origin of this footwork still remains uncertain, it is considered to have been derived from the *natawari bols* (syllables) ta, thei, and tat. Natawara is

DANCE STYLE LOCATOR

(Kathak, continued)

another name for the deity Lord Krishna, meaning “Lord of the dance” or “best among dancers.” It is believed that when Natawara subdued the monster-serpent Kaliya and danced on its hood, the sound ta, thei and tat were produced.

In kathak, the idea of worship through dance involves the spiritual relationship of the dancer in contact with the earth, in order to reach God.

Ta, body (from *Tanu*)

Thei, Earth (from *Sthela*)

Ei, Lord (from *Eishwara*)

The body that dances on the earth for the Lord.

Tatkar has developed into a very sophisticated system of footwork and rhythmic patterns. Modern kathak leans heavily on the elements of technique, and *tatkar* is the fundamental footwork from which all other foot sounds and compositions are created. By nature it is a very grounding force, and when executed correctly resonates a melodious sound.

Tatkar is also a study into the power of energy.

The soles of the feet generate a flow of energy which streams through all the cells in the muscles and bones of the body as the body moves in tune with the energy. The energy flows up to the crown of the mind, dissolving thought as it unites with the energy, and a harmony of body and mind is realized. It is at this level that dance becomes a yogic practice.

